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Connect the Disconnected: Enhance Teaching and Learning with an Implementation of Culturally Responsive Lesson Planning Practices which Improves Instructional School Climate and Accountability Data

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CONNECT THE DISCONNECTED: ENHANCE TEACHING AND LEARNING
WITH AN IMPLEMENTATION OF CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE LESSON
PLANNING PRACTICES WHICH IMPROVE INSTRUCTION, SCHOOL CLIMATE
AND ACCOUNTABILITY DATA

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Educational Leadership Doctoral Program

Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements of
Doctor of Education
in Educational Leadership

National College of Education
National Louis University

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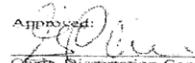
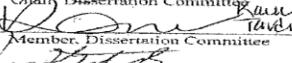
A THREE PART DISSERTATION:

THE EFFECTIVE EDUCATOR: RESHAPE THE QUALITY OF TEACHERS' INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES WITH THE IMPLEMENTATION OF CHARLOTTE DANIELSON'S FRAMEWORK FOR TEACHING

WORK SMARTER NOT HARDER: RESHAPING ELEMENTARY SCHOOL SCHEDULING PRACTICES WITH AN IMPLEMENTATION OF A PARALLEL BLOCK SCHEDULING SYSTEM AS A MEANS TO EFFECTIVELY AND EFFICIENTLY REACH SCHOOL OUR GOALS

CONNECT THE DISCONNECTED: ENHANCE TEACHING AND LEARNING WITH AN IMPLEMENTATION OF CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE LESSON PLANNING PRACTICES WHICH IMPROVE INSTRUCTION, SCHOOL CLIMATE AND ACCOUNTABILITY DATA

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Abstract

Unsavory behavior data and high absenteeism from classes indicated that some teachers were failing to effectively meet the behavior/academic needs of the most challenging students who attended this elementary school. These students needed individualized services specifically tailored to meet their special needs. It was also noted that these students were more apt to learn when strong relationships/rapport existed between their teachers and them. A revised lesson plan policy that required teachers to infuse culturally responsive teaching strategies was implemented. A qualitative research design which included data reviews, professional development with exit slips and teacher interviews were utilized as the research methodology to determine the success of this implementation. Students remained inside their classrooms learning and incident referrals were reduced.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the most significant people in my life: my sons (Brandon and Holase, Jr.), brothers (Robert, Brian and Desmond), parents (Julius and Sharon), nephews (Demetrius, Desmond, Daelen and Dallas), niece (LaNyla), cousin (Melvin), best friends (Tanyialisa, Martha and Charm), Goddaughters (Alexa and Iyanna), principal coach (Beverly), muses (Victor, Mark and Claude), cooperating superintendent (Linda), staunch supporters (Reshunda, Amaeshia and Karen), Engleburg Elementary School (staff, students and parents), editors (Wendy and Wanda) and the memory of my favorite aunt and uncle (Helen and Milton). Most importantly, I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my Lord and Savior whom due to his goodness, grace, mercy and favor have blessed me with the intellect, stamina, perseverance, and resilience to complete this work.

Although unplanned and perhaps even unexpected, my birth was no mistake or mishap; and my life was not a fluke of nature. I learned very early that God created me for a reason, a season and with a purpose; and in accordance to his intricate plan for me, He strategically ordered my steps by placing angels along my life's path to inspire and guide the work that I needed to do in order to fulfill the purpose for which I was created to achieve. It is with great humility and a humbled heart that I respectfully dedicate this dissertation to the most influential angels in my life. Without your unconditional love, encouragement, support and understanding along my educational journey this work may have remained just a sequestered dream. Thank you.

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Prelude: The Gretchen Lukas's Story

Gretchen Lucas was a teacher at the Little Canada Elementary School in Roseville, Minnesota. Ms. Lucas reported that she was overwhelmed with the many diverse faces of students who looked back at her during her first days of teaching. Similar to many teachers, who did not grow up in urban areas yet received contracts to teach in them, Ms. Lucas felt disconnected from her students who appeared to be very different from her. She reported that she felt ill-prepared to teach students who did not share her similar cultures, values, beliefs, traditions and/or life experiences. She admitted that she questioned whether she even possessed the professional skills, pedagogical knowledge and cultural awareness that was needed to work effectively with students who were quite frankly very different from her (Lukas, 2007).

Ms. Lukas stated that she grew up in a small town with friends and classmates who resembled her. For the most part, they shared similar cultures, values, beliefs, traditions, family structures and general life experiences. She stated that she spent the first three years of her career teaching in the small town, where she grew up where 95% of the students were White like her. During this time, she had not experienced any major issues relating to, reaching, teaching and/or encouraging students to learn. One could assume that her initial years of teaching in her own community was a comfortable, stress-free and enjoyable experience for her; however, when she accepted a position to teach at Little Canada Elementary School in Roseville, Minnesota, her tides of blissfulness in teaching began to change. Her belief that she was a highly qualified effective educator appeared to be compromised by the many challenges that she faced as she began to

struggle to proficiently reach, teach and motivate students whose diverse faces and lives did not resemble her own.

Ms. Lucas reported that the struggles she endured in her new teaching assignment forced her to reflect more on her own instructional practices and how these practices affected her students' behaviors and learning. For the first time she was faced with the challenge of examining her own personal biases, assumptions, interpretations and perceptions of individuals and their impact on her students. In fact, she stated, "It can be frightening to look at ourselves and reflect on how we feel or think about the students in our classrooms that are not like us" (Lucas, 2007). According to Ms. Lucas, this realization and germination of uncomfortable feelings of inadequacy and ineffectiveness as a classroom teacher caused her to reflect on two questions:

1. How can I create a culturally responsive classroom in my school?
2. How does being culturally responsive affect my instruction?

Unfortunately, Ms. Lucas's early years of teaching appeared to mirror the current realities of a wide range of teachers who teach in our schools today. Her story had become a very common tale for many teachers who teach students with cultures that are different from their own; and it appeared to be especially true for teachers who taught in high poverty urban public school districts across the United States of America.

Coffey (2013), the author of the article entitled, *Culturally Relevant Teaching*, stated that national statistics revealed that the population of the United States was becoming more and more ethnically diverse, yet the teaching force remained the same, mostly white and mostly female. According to the National Center for Educational

Statistics, in September 2014, 49.7% of the students entering public schools were white and 50.3% were either black, Hispanic, Asian or another non-white ethnicity, while 84% of public school teachers were white, 7% were black, 6% were Hispanic and 4% were other non-white ethnicity. In fact, according to Klein the National Center for Educational Statistics at that time, every state in America had a higher percentage of students of color, than teachers of color (Klein, 2014). Coffey stated that this paradigm shift has forced today's teachers to accept the reality that many of their students would report to their classrooms with cultural, ethnic, linguistic, racial and social class backgrounds that were different from their own. Coffey stated, "When faced with the heterogeneous mixture of students in their classrooms, teachers must be prepared to teach all students" (Coffey, 2013, p. 1). Teachers' instructional practices should have not only been informed by the content of the discipline, but also by the lives of their students. Teacher had to engage in culturally relevant teaching practices on a daily basis in order to ensure the success of the students, who ordinarily were unsuccessful in schools.

SECTION ONE: INTRODUCTION

Districts in need of improvement, failing schools, unsavory school climates, poor staff/ student attendance, insufficient academic growth and the numerous achievement gaps between the various subgroups of students which appeared to be growing wider and wider each year, served as definite indicators that many teachers who worked in high poverty urban schools across the nation appeared to struggle with effectively and efficiently reaching, teaching and meeting the vast behavioral and diverse academic needs of the students they were contracted to teach. Although there may have been many extenuating circumstances that could justifiably be used to explain students' failure

during this time, it was believed that teachers' inadequate and ineffective lesson planning practices that lacked infusions of culturally responsive teaching strategies served as one of the primary contributors to the systemic nationwide failures in the academic success of many students, especially students of color. Similar to Gretchen Lucas's personal synopsis of her early years of teaching, many of these teachers appeared to be unable to make the necessary cultural connections with students in an effort to build positive relationships, effectively engage students in their learning process and efficiently navigate students through their personal learning journeys, so they experienced success.

Landsman and Lewis, the authors of the book, *White Teachers/Diverse Classrooms*, stated, "If urban schools are to close the achievement gaps, maximally educate urban students and create healthy rapport among students, teachers and community addressing concepts of teacher preparation, cultural literacy and relationship as essential learning and teaching methods must become a top priority" (Lewis, 2011, p. 96). Landsman and Lewis encouraged schools to begin this work by building their teachers' cultural awareness, reshaping their instructional practices and assisting them to become more culturally proficient. It was suggested that school leaders were encouraged to initiate this work by developing, mandating, implementing and reinforcing uses of a lesson plan policy that required teachers to create lesson plans utilizing a universal template and infusions of researched-based culturally responsive teaching strategies. It was a belief that quality lesson plans served as one of the critical foundational blocks that was a necessity and needed to guide teachers' instructional practices to effectively instruct students. Teachers' lesson planning practices should be purposeful, intentional

and done in preparation to connect students to their own learning, yet quite often these professional practices were oftentimes the missing links.

Rhalimi, the author of the article entitled, *The Main Reason for Lesson Plans: Are Lesson Plan Necessary*, stated that the production of lesson plans constitute a major part of being a teacher. The importance of developing effective lesson plans are sometimes underestimated by teachers, despite the fact that lesson plans should serve as a guide for managing their classroom environments and the learning process of students (Rhalimi, 2010). According to Rhalimi (2010), the reason lesson plans are important is because they provide both the teachers and students with clarity, predictable events, framework, reminders and commitments to the tasks. According to Danielson (2007), lesson planning and preparation is the behind the scene work that teachers do in an effort to organize for classroom instruction. As such, in order to maximize learning, teachers not only are expected to have a clear and accurate understanding of their subject and pedagogy, they are also expected to know their students.

Danielson research indirectly stated that an infusion of culturally responsive teaching strategies is also a necessity for effective lesson planning. She stated that teachers have to develop an understanding of the general principles that define their students' learning and incorporate these principles into their lesson planning practices. Teachers have to know what students can learn and be able to understand based on their background, prior knowledge and experiences. Effective educators must build on what their students already know and engage them in the development of their own understanding to effectively reach and teach them. Danielson stated that skilled teachers (culturally proficient teachers) are able to assist students to build on their own strengths,

interests and talents. Most importantly, skilled teachers understand that students' academic knowledge is not the only area that affects their learning. Students report to school every day with their own misunderstandings and their parents' opinions; and these dynamics alone have tremendous effects on their willingness to learn (Danielson, 1996, p. 46). In order to experience success, teachers' lesson planning and preparation practices must be centered on what is best for students.

Danielson stated, "Teachers do not teach their subjects in a vacuum, they teach them to students" (Danielson, 1996, p. 46). Culturally proficient teachers understand that the knowledge that students bring to school with them from home strongly influences their school-based learning; and these social and cultural characteristics impact how they learn, interpret events, participate in learning activities and gain new knowledge. Student experiences affect how they view the world and their place in it. Teachers, who are culturally proficient, frequently solicit students' knowledge, interests and strengths by administering surveys, collaborating with other teachers/parents and paying close attention to them as they engage in their learning environments. These teachers include the knowledge of students in their instructional plans and interactions while in the classrooms (Danielson, 1996, p. 49). They utilized culturally responsive lesson plans as their roadmap to intentionally close the various achievement gaps, maximally educate urban students, create healthy rapport among students, teachers and community and help students reach their required academic destinations (Lewis, 2011, p. 96).

In 1992, Ladson-Billings, one of the first pioneers to explore the importance of teachers' culturally responsive practices, created and introduced the term "culturally relevant teaching" to the educational arena. She coined this term to describe an

instructional pedagogy that teachers could use to empower their students' by incorporating their intellectual, social, emotional and political experiences to enhance their school connectedness (Ladson-Billings, 1994, pp. 17 - 18). She suggested that teachers utilize their students' experiences as cultural referents to impart their knowledge, skills and attitudes and make their learning experiences in school relevant, real and worthwhile. According to Ladson-Billings (1994), when teachers participate in culturally relevant teaching practices, they begin to build the necessary bridge between students' homes and school lives which are needed to ensure and sustain success for all students, while still meeting their district/state curricular requirements, standards and expectations.

Coffey (2013) suggested that Ladson-Billings developed the term "culturally relevant teaching" as a way to provide for the academic success of African American and other children of color who were not being served efficiently and/or effectively by America's public schools. Coffey stated that when teachers practiced culturally relevant teaching, they utilized the backgrounds, knowledge and experiences of their students to inform their lesson planning and instructional methodology. It was her belief that when teachers' lesson planning practices and instructional methodology reflected the cultural contributions and interests of their students, then these teachers significantly increased the possibilities of making learning more rigorous, real, relevant, beneficial and worthwhile for all.

Growing Awareness of this Particular Policy Issues

During classroom observations of teachers' instructional practices and confirmations received from countless conversations with principals from coast to coast during conferences, an awareness developed that there was a growing problem for many

teachers, especially those who taught students of color and/or poverty, to build positive relationships and create the necessary cultural connections with students to adequately reach and teach. Teachers, who were not culturally proficient, appeared to demonstrate major struggles with designing coherent instruction that sustained students' attention maximized time on task and sparked their desire to learn. Evidence from classroom observations confirmed that many teachers at Greener Pastures Second Chance Academy, especially those whose cultures differed from their students, failed to effectively plan, prepare, utilize and reflect sufficient knowledge of their students in their lesson planning practices. Their instructional practices oftentimes lacked proficient infusions of researched-based culturally responsive teaching strategies that could positively impact the instructional outcomes for student learning.

Evidence statements from classroom observations demonstrated that there were stark differences between the learning environments, behaviors, engagement levels and students' willingness to learn in classrooms where the teachers could regularly provide completed, detailed, thorough and tangible written lesson plans upon request, then teachers who could not. Teachers who produced quality lesson plans that included culturally responsive teaching strategies tended to facilitate positive classroom environments with clear and high expectations, missions, visions, values, goals and common beliefs. They had clear expectations for both their students' learning and behavior. These key components appeared to work together to shape, establish and guide the culture for learning in these classrooms and have a positive impact. There were more positive relationships between teachers to students and student to student. This was evidenced by the mutual respect and rapport that was reflected in their personal

interactions. There were visible signs of quality time spent on tasks, minimal disruptions of learning opportunities, smooth transitions between subjects and increased work productivity. Students in these classrooms were actively engaged in the learning process and appeared to take pride in both the quality of their work and learning. These students, without being asked, shared their work and accomplishments with whoever was willing to take interest, listen and look. As Danielson described in her work, the learning experiences for students in these classrooms were powerful and meaningful, because the students were in control of their own learning (Danielson, 1996).

On the other hand, the circumstances were quite different for the classroom observations of teachers with subpar lesson planning practices that lacked the presence of culturally responsive teaching strategies. The teachers in these classrooms typically could not produce completed, detailed, thorough and/or tangible written lesson plans upon request. These teachers facilitated classroom environments where students appeared to be bored, disconnected from learning and regularly expressed an unwillingness to remain inside their classrooms. This was evidenced by the students' consistent efforts to avoid work and/or escape their classrooms and oftentimes without permission. These learning environments generally were chaotic, disruptive, volatile and classified as unsafe learning conditions. This was evidenced by the many fights, injuries and high number of office incident referrals for students' breaches of misconduct. The work productivity level was very low and administrators spent a good portion of their workdays inside these classrooms extinguishing explosions. There tended to be minimal respect displayed during teacher to student and student to student interactions. Neither the teachers nor the students displayed pride in their work and/or accepted responsibility for both their

negative contributions toward the unsavory conditions of their learning environments and/or data. Needless to say, the cultures for learning in these classrooms were not conducive for students to learn.

Teachers in these classrooms did not appear to take a personal interest in their students' learning and/or their lives outside of school. They developed, implemented and/or submitted lesson plans that rarely, if ever, included sufficient knowledge of their students' learning processes, learning styles, special needs, skills and/or accurate academic proficiency levels. Many of these teachers neglected to include and/or utilize a wide variety of available resources to make learning fun nor did they select educational activities which were aligned to their students' interests or cultural heritage. Their weekly lesson plans merely consisted of a grid with the days of the week, the subjects to be taught, time allotments for each subject and page number entries; and some teachers did not regularly maintain lesson plans at all. Surprisingly, they taught off the cuff... daily!

[District's Lesson Plan Policy](#)

During the 2015-2016 school year, the district's lesson plan policy and expectations for teachers' lesson planning practices was very vague and generic. This policy gave teachers total autonomy to create their own lesson plans. This policy did not require teachers to utilize a uniformed template which included specific components. There were a few lesson plan templates offered by the district, but the choice to utilize them was at the teachers' discretion. In addition, this plan policy did not include a requirement for teachers to plan for and/or implement a researched-based differentiation model that could build resilience in diverse students, reach students culturally and/or effectively connect students to their own learning.

Characteristics of Culturally Proficient Teachers

According to Walker-Tileston and Darling (2008), authors of the book entitled, *Why Culture Counts: Teaching Children of Poverty*, teachers who are culturally proficient prepare and plan for instruction by building their own background knowledge. They differentiate their lessons to meet the needs of both economically and culturally diverse learners and implement a pedagogy that narrows the achievement gap. In essence, these teachers build upon their professional practices by strategically and intentionally creating culturally responsive classrooms which are representative of all cultures. They persistently/consistently pursue strategies and activities that allow all students to experience success. They relate theory to their practice and incorporate the uses of innovative ideas in their lesson planning and instructional practices (Darling, 2008, pp. 56-57).

Lesson plans are modified to differentiate context, content, product and process for student learning (Darling, 2008, pp. 9-11). Culturally responsive teachers incorporate strategies that allow opportunities to pre-teach essential vocabulary, contextualize the content and classroom for culture, and determine the instructional groups (Darling, 2008, p. 41). They dismiss misconceptions about students of poverty and cultures other than their own and unyielding communicate high expectations (Darling, 2008, pp. 37-38). Instead, they create lessons that build resilience. Tileston and Darling stated, “Resilient children succeed academically and socially despite the severe situations and obstacles they face (Darling, 2008, p. 164).”

Critical Issues that Warrant this Policy

According to Carbo (1995), one of the authors of the book entitled, *Educating Everybody's Children: Diverse Teaching Strategies for Diverse Learners*, children who

attend schools in the United States are becoming more ethnically and culturally diverse. Unfortunately, a disproportionate number of these students of color consistently performed in the lower third academically; therefore, the time honored practices of “teaching as usual” in America’s classrooms has proven to be ineffective and damaging for many students, particularly for those at risk of academic failure. She stated that an overhaul of America’s educational system was needed in order to improve student learning by focusing on successful classroom practices. Carbo stated, “The educational course charted in the next few years would play a major role in determining whether we would be able to truly educate everybody’s children to be successful, productive citizens in the twenty-first century” (Carbo, 1995, p. 1).

Critical Issues associated with the Current Policy

There were several critical issues that made the problems associated with the previous lesson plan policy and made it in need of an urgent response. First, the critical accountability data reflected that this was a failing school. Approximately 60% of the students were not proficient in the core subjects (reading, writing and math); and there were a high number of incidents referrals submitted for students’ unacceptable behavior. Majority of these incidents occurred in the classroom environments and about 20% of the student population was classified as chronic disruptors. Students consistently complained that their teachers did not like or care about them, and many of the chronic disruptors regularly escaped their classrooms oftentimes without permission. Student attendance was good, but the health conditions and well-being of the teachers was on a slow decline. Many teachers consistently complained about high stress levels, suffrage from fatigue and teetering on the edge of burn out.

The teachers did not routinely plan for instruction utilizing behaviors that mirrored those of culturally responsive teachers that allowed all students to experience success. According to Walker Tileston and Darling, culturally responsive teachers effectively work with diverse learners in urban school settings by creating culturally responsive classrooms. CRT teachers promote learning environments that are inviting to students (Darling, 2008, p. 57). Some teachers at this school did not reflect a genuine welcoming with their personal messages to students and/or their parents. In fact, some students reported that their teachers made them feel unwanted by making insensitive snide comments or putting them out of the classrooms. Some students also reported that they did not feel a sense of belonging and were not treated like valuable members of their community.

Some teachers struggled to manage their students' behaviors and adequately address the needs of their classroom atmosphere. Teachers who experienced these problems did not consistently manage their classroom environments with firm, consistent and loving control. Some students in these classrooms made numerous trips to the office for disciplinary reasons and oftentimes reported that their teachers picked on them and/or targeted them for no reason. They stated that they were afraid to take educational risks because their teachers or other students would laugh and make fun of them. According to Walker Tileston and Darling, teachers who are culturally responsive communicate that they have a belief that students can accomplish the tasks that are being asked of them. They stated, "Teachers have a belief system that is promising and provide hope, more importantly, they stress an expectation of collectivity rather than individualism"

(Darling, 2008, p. 57). It was believed that this policy was critical because some teachers were not creating classrooms that openly embraced students.

A select group of teachers appeared to lack knowledge of effective culturally responsive teaching strategies. According to Walker Tileston and Darling (2008), culturally responsive teachers who effectively work with diverse learners in urban school settings constantly pursue strategies and plan activities that ensure that all students can be successful in their classrooms. Some of the teachers at this school did not appear to be knowledgeable of culturally responsive teaching strategies; therefore, they were not consistently planning and/or taking responsibility for their student learning, including the learning of students at risk. In fact, during several of the monthly data chats discussions, some teachers made excuses to explain away why their student data was not reflective of their “true” efforts; while a few others simply neglected to apply theory to their teachable moments and incorporate innovative culturally responsive strategies into their daily instructional practices. Shamefully, some teachers did not always understand that teachers’ success were oftentimes achieved by hard work and effort, not just ability.

Another problem was some teachers did not understand the power of cooperative learning and the positive impact it could have on student learning. The predominant instructional strategy that was used throughout this school was whole group direct instruction. There was very little to no evidence of effective implementations the differentiation of context, content, product, process and assessments. Quality differentiation techniques were not satisfactorily included in many teachers’ lesson plans. The previous lesson plans were tailored to meet the personal comfort level of the teachers’ instructional practices not personalized to help better meet their students’

behavior and academic needs. According to Walker Tileston and Darling (2008), culturally responsive teachers persistently find new approaches to help their students' master concepts, content and materials. If teachers were satisfactorily planning and preparing to differentiate instruction for their students, then this would be evident by their consistent engagement in actively teaching small groups and not maintaining a dependence on whole group direct instruction.

Majority of the teachers did not possess the emotional and physical stamina that was needed to allow them to endure the challenges and many crisis that oftentimes occurred in the school environment as a result of the student behaviors and their disconnections to learning. Some teachers neglected to take the much needed time at the beginning of the school year to develop the necessary personal bonds with their students and/or treat their students in the same manner that they would their own personal children. In fact, some of the less effective teachers, especially those at the intermediate levels, tended to respond to their students with inappropriate snide comments and expected their students not respond back negatively. According to Walker Tileston and Darling, "culturally responsive teachers are capable of adjusting to and coping with the demands of bureaucracy" (Darling, 2008, pp. 56-57). There were many times when some teachers were not capable of making any adjustments to their personal behaviors and/or coping with the demands of bureaucracy. As a result, their students displayed a dislike for them and teachers reciprocated their feelings by responding in the same manner as their students.

The final problem was that some teachers refrained from consistently selecting educational activities that students viewed as meaningful; nor did they provide

supplemental curriculum activities that included the contributions and perspectives of the different ethno-cultural groups that made up the society around them. Only a few of the teachers provided scaffolding opportunities for student learning that linked the academically challenging and inclusive curriculum to cultural resources that students brought to school. Most of the teachers communicated high expectations to all students, along with the belief that all students could succeed; however, they did not reinforce their verbiage by providing academically challenging curriculum that included attention to the promotion of building higher level cognitive skills. The most critical issue that made this policy in need of a response was the fact that many teachers neglected to plan for instruction to guide students to create meaning about content in an interactive, collaborative learning environment

Policy Recommendation

As part of this policy advocacy project, this school's learning team and later the other teachers collectively revised their lesson plan policy to make it reflect requirements of all classroom teachers to infuse researched-based culturally responsive teaching strategies into their lesson plans. Performance expectations were added to the revised policy to help teachers tailor their planning practices by personalizing their instruction and aligning it to their students' learning styles, cultural, academic and behavior needs. The revised lesson plan policy applied to all subject areas and included regular usage of a universal lesson plan template. All teachers were required to develop and submit monthly unit/ weekly lesson plans regularly to the principal and/or school support teacher for review and to receive constructive feedback which promoted improvement.

A universal template was developed and included specific key elements which reflected an integration of culturally responsive teaching strategies. The suggested format

and key elements of the revised template included the following specific and critical components:

- ✓ Anticipatory set to elicit prior knowledge
- ✓ Learning intentions and success criteria
- ✓ Instructional time frames with adequate time for students to practice skills
- ✓ Instructional groups
- ✓ Clear differentiation of context, content, product, process and assessments for below, on and above levels
- ✓ Educational activities with integrated researched-based culturally responsive teaching strategies that were aligned to the district pacing guides, the Common Core State Standards and student interests/cultural heritage
- ✓ Opportunities for teacher and student reflection of lessons
- ✓ Opportunities for cooperative learning during activities
- ✓ Assessments with clearly aligned rubrics
- ✓ Materials to be used to teach each lesson
- ✓ Outline of the instructional design:
 - Before the lesson
 - During the lesson
 - End of the lesson
- ✓ Closure with a summary of what students learned from the students

- opportunities for open dialogue and discussions related to students' thoughts of, comments on and suggestions for the content

The primary goals for the usage of the template were simply to serve as a guide to help teachers' intentionally and strategically plan for instruction and the culture for learning in their classrooms.

Benefits of this Policy Recommendation

According to Rhalmi (2010), effective and efficient lesson planning practices could have be beneficial for both teachers and students. Lesson plans are beneficial for teachers, because they did not have to think on their feet or figuratively fall on their face in front of their students. Lesson plans provide teachers with clear road maps of the procedures they need to follow to build on their previous teaching and prepare for the upcoming lessons. Lesson plans are beneficial for students because they help students to realize that their teachers care about their learning; and they help students to attend to a structured lesson, which make it easier for them to assimilate. They help students to appreciate their teachers' work and can serve as a model of well-organized work for students to imitate (Rhalmi, 2010). If constructed and implemented efficiently and effectively, well-crafted lesson plans can be utilized to assist teachers, schools and districts to improve their critical accountability measures.

According to Walker Tileston and Darling (2008), if schools truly want to raise the learning levels of their students, they have to first know the culture from which they came. Walker Tileston and Darling (2008) stated in their work that before teachers can effectively reach and teach students, they have to know how the culture of their students learn, the values that the various cultures place on education and how within that culture

motivation is triggered. They stated that if teachers know the cultures of the students in their schools and the neighborhoods that surround them, then this knowledge can help teachers to look at the gifts and life experiences that their students bring to school with them and refrain from focusing on the deficits. Walker Tileston and Darling stated, “When we (teachers) know this, we can make more informed decisions about how to teach them” (students) (Darling, 2008, p. 7).

Unlike the previous lesson plan policy, the revised policy required teachers to identify and describe in detail how they planned to ensure that students learned the intended content, what content was mastered, what content needed to be re-taught when students struggled and how learning opportunities were extended for students who already mastered the content. The expectation of an inclusion of CRT strategies/practices created a shared responsibility and partnerships to form for teaching and learning. The revised policy encouraged opportunities for teacher/student relationships to grow and for teachers to make the necessary cultural connections with students that were needed to foster learning, academic growth and achievement. It provided opportunities for students to take responsibility/ownership of their own learning and work in partnership with their teachers to create safe and respectful classroom environments. By bridging the gap between homes and school, teachers and students were encouraged to make teaching and learning mutual and reciprocal.

The final benefit of this revised lesson plan policy was it contributed positively to the improvement of our overall school climates by helping to create opportunities for the acceptances of and respect for other peoples’ cultural differences. An improved school climate contributed to improvements of the school’s critical data sources: attendance,

behavior and academic performance/ achievement. It was believed that if teachers' improved their instructional practices by connecting to their students culturally, then classroom environments would be more conducive to learning. Students had an increased desire to remain inside their classrooms, produced more work, cooperated with their classroom teachers and learned!

Vision of the Policy's Effectiveness in Meeting the Problems

The recommendations of this advocated lesson plan policy was effective in assisting the teachers at this school to resolve the current problems with their inadequate lesson planning practices. The implementation of this policy served as the starting point that was needed to find the answers to the essential question and led to the schoolwide transformation of continuous improvement that was desired during this time. The school as a whole became more culturally proficient. The teachers began to effectively meet the diverse needs of this school's transient and changing demographic population of students.

The school leader in partnership with the learning team set higher standards and expectations for teachers to improve their instructional practices by developing and implementing quality lesson plans that created positive impacts on teaching and learning. The emphasis on cultural awareness and proficiency began to improve the connections of teachers to students by creating better understandings, promoting reciprocal teaching opportunities and enhancing positive working relationships. This dynamic led to improved work productivity, a improved school climate and higher academic achievement.

The teachers began to genuinely care about their students; and the students began to like their teachers. This was evidenced by a reduction in incident referrals, increased celebrations and both parties' displays of happiness. The cultural bridges that once

disconnected and distinctly divided the schools and homes, and inadvertently teachers and students, began to reconnect, mend, become stronger, sturdier and created the partnerships that were needed to ensure that school and home worked together collectively to ensure that the students received a quality education.

The impact of the revised policy on the future of other schools and/or school districts across America remains to be seen; however, it is hoped that the content shared in this project would encourage them to revisit and revise their own lesson plan policies and require infusions of culturally responsive teaching strategies. It is believed that if they too reshape their teachers' lesson planning practices, then they can also begin to strengthen their students' connectedness to school, improve teaching, learning and climate and graduate higher populations of students who are thoroughly prepared for either career and or college readiness. It is hoped that the dismal school climates, critical data measures and academic gaps that are strong and prevalent during this time will become a thing of the past!

Section Two: Analysis of Need

In an effort to evoke a fuller understanding and define more specifically the problems and context that were associated with the previous lesson plan policy and this school's critical need to revise it, an analysis was conducted of the school's needs. The purpose of this needs assessment was to create an urgency for instructional improvement using real data. This assessment included highlights of this school's current reality, a rationale of the need for teachers to implement CRT lesson plans and traced implications if teachers chose comply with the revised policy. The analysis of needs examined five distinct disciplinary areas: educational, economic, social, political, moral and ethical.

This information from these disciplines were utilized to help adequately address and trace these implications.

School's Reality

This school was a traditional elementary school located on the northwest side of Milwaukee, Wisconsin. It was classified as a neighborhood school; and most of the students lived in the neighborhood. At the beginning of the 2015–2016 school year, it had fifty-eight staff members and three hundred and sixty-three students. Of the fifty-eight staff members, twenty-four were classroom teachers, directly responsible for teaching students; and thirty-four were support staff. Of the twenty four classroom teachers, twelve were White females, seven were Black females, and five were White males and no Black male teachers. Of the three hundred and sixty-three students, two hundred and one were males and one hundred and sixty-two were females, three hundred and thirty –five students were Black, six students were White, eleven students were Hispanic, five students were Asian, four students were American Indian and two students were multi-racial. Eighty-four percent of the student population was economically disadvantaged; 27.8% received special education services and 0.3% were English as Second Language Learners. The student attendance rate was 91.3% with a 15% absenteeism rate.

According to this school's 2014 – 2015 discipline data, there were four hundred and thirty-nine incident referrals which most were submitted for fighting and classroom disruptions. Majority of the incidents occurred inside the classrooms between 10:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m. daily. There was only one suspension issued the entire school year.

According to the school's October 2015 Early Literacy STAR Data, one hundred and forty-four students in grades kindergarten through second were assessed. Of the one hundred and forty-four students who were assessed, 0% scored significantly above target,

33% scored on target, and 17% scored below target, 33% scored well below target and 17% scored significant below target in accordance to the national standards for the grade level expectations. According to the schools' October 2015 Reading STAR Data, two hundred and twenty-one students in grades first through fifth were assessed. Of the two hundred and twenty-one students who were assessed, 12% scored significantly above target, 12% percent scored on target, 5% scored below target, 22% scored well below target and 49% scored significantly below target in accordance to the national standards for their grade level. According to my school's October 2015 Math STAR Data, two hundred and twenty-one students were assessed in grades first through second. Of the two hundred and twenty-one students who were assessed in math, 7% scored significantly above target, 29% scored on target, 12% scored below target, 17% scored well below target and 34% scored significantly below target in accordance to the national standards for their grade level.

According to our November 2015, first trimester report card reading data, there were forty-five five-year old kindergarteners whom 60% were proficient in reading and 40% were not. Of the forty-nine first graders, 8% were proficient in reading and 92% were not. Of the fifty second graders, 24% were proficient in reading and 66% were not. Of the thirty-five third graders, 9% were proficient in reading and 91% were not. Of the forty-five fourth graders, 18% were proficient in reading and 82% were not. Of the forty-three fifth graders, 14% were proficient in reading and 86% were not.

According to our November 2015, first trimester report card writing data, there were forty-five five-year old kindergarteners whom 71% were proficient in writing and 29% were not. Of the forty-nine first graders, 47% were proficient in writing and 53%

were not. Of the fifty second graders, 30% were proficient in writing and 70% were not. Of the thirty-five third graders, 14% were proficient in writing and 86% were not. Of the forty-five fourth graders, 22% were proficient in writing and 87% were not. Of the forty-three fifth graders, 33% were proficient in writing and 67% were not.

According to our November 2015, first trimester report card math data, there were forty-five five-year old kindergarteners whom 67% were proficient in math and 33% were not. Of the forty-nine first graders, 65% were proficient in math and 35% were not. Of the fifty second graders, 34% were proficient in math and 66% were not. Of the thirty-five graders third graders, 40% were proficient in math and 60% percent were not. Of the forty-five fourth graders, 18% were proficient in math and 82% were not. Of the forty-three fifth graders, 19% were proficient in math and 81% were not.

The teachers' declining attendance, the high number of disciplinary referrals and the dismal academic data served as clear indicators that what the staff was doing was clearly not working. According to the critical accountability data, this school was on track to leave approximately 60% of their students behind in all three core subjects. That fact alone was enough to create the strong sense of urgency to justify this need to change teachers' instructional practices beginning the foundation of teaching, the lesson planning.

Rationale for the Need for Culturally Responsive Lesson Plans

Randall et al. stated, "A number of shifts in society gave rise to a cultural imperative: shifting population demographics, a shifting global economy, a shifting of social integration and interaction paradigm, and shifting of the goal for assimilation to biculturalism" (Randall, 2009, p.12). According to Randall et al. (2009), today's teachers have a professional responsibility to respond to the issues that emerge in these diverse

environments because effective responses to diversity target several mutually interactive goals about which educators care deeply. They stated in their book that teachers' should respond to these diverse environments by doing the following:

- Enhance students' ability to learn and teachers' ability to teach
- Prepare students to find their own place in their own global communities
- Promote positive community relationships
- Prepare students for outstanding citizenship
- Foster effective leadership

Randall et al. (2009), acknowledged that addressing these complex issues may be daunting, but it is work that has to be done, if teachers wished to ensure that teaching and learning occurs in their classrooms.

Randall et al, (2009) also stated in order for effective teaching and learning to take place in today's classrooms, teachers must become culturally proficient and adopt the practices of culturally responsive teachers. They stated, teachers must rise to the challenges, if they want to teach their students effectively and before students will display a willingness to learn what their teachers offer, students must first feel fully appreciated as individuals within the context of their own distinctive ethnic, linguistic, socioeconomic background, genders, sexual orientation, sensory and physically abilities. Teachers need to address the issues that arises in the midst of diversity and respond sensitively to students in ways that can facilitate their learning. They stated, "Additionally, educators need to address issues of diversity to provide mutual support to one another so that every

educator feels understood and respected for who they are and the groups to which they belong” (Robins, 2009, p. 13).

Educational Analysis

The implications if teachers’ continued to plan for instruction without inclusions of culturally responsive teaching strategies from an educational perspective had the potential to negatively affect students’ feelings of school connectedness and inadvertently their willingness to learn. Blum (2005) indirectly highlighted the importance of culturally relevant lesson planning when he discussed the value of school connectedness in his article entitled, *A Case for School Connectedness*. He stated that students were more likely to learn and succeed in schools when they feel connected in school. He described school connectedness as an academic environment in which students believe that the adults in their schools care about their learning and them as individuals. He stated that by the time students reached high school 40% to 60% of them became chronically disengaged in school due to their disconnectedness. He reported that about half of the students enrolled in high schools did not believe that the adults in their schools cared about them as individuals or their learning; therefore, they were not interested in learning and/or being connected to school. He stated that the following core values need to be present if schools wish for students to develop and sustain feelings of school connectedness:

- ✓ High expectations and rigor coupled with a support for learning
- ✓ Positive adult student relationships
- ✓ Physical and emotional safety

Blum (2005) believed that if these values were present, especially in high schools, then school climates and critical accountability measures should reflect improvement over time.

According to Blum (2005), schools where students experienced feelings of disconnectedness from their teachers and school environments were more likely to experience many cultural and climate issues. Blum identified disruptive behaviors, school violence, emotional distress and substance abuse as visible indicators that students were disconnected from schools and its offerings. Blum stated, “Schools cannot create school connectedness on their own. Without the support of supportive administration (and parents), teachers will not be able to effectively support the students” (Blum, 2005, p. 20). With the exception of substance abuse, many of the students who were enrolled in the elementary school that was highlighted in this research, at some point, displayed all of these behaviors.

According to Blum (2005), if schools improve their students’ sense of belonging by increasing their school connectedness, then their critical accountability measures would more likely reflect positive results. He stated that the potential critical accountability measures would be influenced, as a result of the creation of school connectedness among students, were academic performance, incidents of fighting, bullying and vandalism, absenteeism and school completion rates. Blum stated that there is strong scientific research that supports that schools who focus on strengthening their students’ school connectedness tend to experience major improvements in their accountability data; and evidence of this success is visibly manifested in students’ motivational levels, classroom engagement and improved school attendance.

In an effort to help teachers understand the importance of lesson planning with infusions of culturally responsive teaching strategies Blum suggested that teachers utilize the following strategy when planning for instruction:

- ✓ Implement high standards and expectations
- ✓ Provide academic support to all students
- ✓ Apply and consistently fair disciplinary policies that are collectively agreed upon by both teachers and students
- ✓ Create trusting relationships among teachers and students
- ✓ Foster high parental involvement expectations for students' school performance and school completion
- ✓ Ensure that every student feel close to at least one supportive adult

Blum believed that if schools implement “best bet” research-based strategies and programs, then they will improve and sustain their critical accountable measures. He stated, “We are responsible for our schools, we need to use what research and our experience have taught us to create schools where students feel connected” (Blum, 2005, p. 20).

Economic Analysis

It is a well-known fact that education is a key factor in obtaining a job that allows one to make money, support a living and contribute to a growing economy. The amount of money students have the potential to earn depends largely on their education level, career choices and the length of time they invested in their careers. The more educated students are the more money they are likely to make; therefore, the implications from an economic perspective of teachers' subpar lesson planning practices could have detrimentally affected students' preparation for college/career readiness and their future financial

standing within their communities. As such, the lesson plan policy that governed the manner in which teachers planned for instruction had to clearly define an expectation for teachers to ensure that all students were adequately prepared for their future economic successes.

Wagner (2010) stated that although there was a national expectation for teachers to prepare students for economic success, many schools in our nation were not adequately preparing students to compete for the twenty-first century world of work as evidenced by the high number of school failures that occurred in every state and the negative contributions to the global achievement gap. He stated that teachers must do a better job of effectively reaching, teaching and connecting with students, especially students of color, if they were to effectively engage them in learning, promote achievement and ensure that they graduate from high schools college and/or career ready.

Wagner (2010) reported that the high school graduation rates in the United States were behind other countries, such as Denmark, Japan, Poland and Italy and about one third of the students in the United States graduated from high schools college-ready. He reported that the graduation rate for students of color was even lower. Approximately 40% of minority students had to enroll in remedial classes upon entering college, and one out of every two students started but never received their intended degree.

According to the United States 2000 Census Bureau, the average income earning potential for students was determined by the amount of schooling he/she received. The average salary for individuals with various levels of schooling per year was as follows:

- ✓ \$4,349 without a high school diploma
- ✓ \$23,233 a diploma

- ✓ \$31,684 an associate degree
- ✓ \$45,648 a bachelor's degree
- ✓ \$56,958 a master's degree
- ✓ \$87,644 a doctorate degree

Randall et al, stated, "As the business community has learned, this nation's economy and political well-being depends on the ability of educators to foster an appreciation of diversity" (Lindsey, 2009, p. 13).

Political Analysis

According to the 14th Amendment of the United States Constitution, all students have a right to a free and public education. As such, if teachers continued to fail with making cultural connection with students, and students continued to spend countless hours away from their learning environments due to absenteeism/discipline, then teachers indirectly denied students access to their education and continued to grow the various achievement gaps; therefore, the implications from a political perspective was a violation of some students' constitutional rights.

Muhammad (2005), the author of the book, *Overcoming the Achievement Trap: Liberating Mindsets to Effect Change*, stated that the historical context of the achievement gap began with race followed by poverty. He reported that racial gaps, due to inequalities has been tracked for decades.

Several members of the Forum, stated that in order for equity and access to be promoted for all children, policy makers' beliefs must include the following thoughts:

- ✓ All students deserved well-prepared and supportive teachers who know their content and teach it well

- ✓ All students deserve access to an educational experience that fully prepares them for the challenges and opportunities of democratic life
- ✓ The shared missions of schools should be to resolve issues of race, class, gender, and special capacities on students' successes by working with families and ensuring that adequate communications between school and home occurs
- ✓ View the achievement gaps as educational debts and reflect on how we, as a democratic society, implicated its creation and can address the achievement disparities
- ✓ Reduce the educational debts - schools refrain from working in isolation. Schools include students in the planning of their learning conditions and journeys
- ✓ Encourage all schools to demonstrate non-discriminatory and inclusive policies, practices and pedagogies.

They believed One member at the Forum stated, "Schools should honor diversity and build on the strength of their communities, deliberately and explicitly challenging all forms of inequity" (Bloggers, 2015).

Social Analysis

The implications from a social perspective was poverty. Teachers had to develop an understanding that their instructional practices directly impacted their students' abilities to function as productive citizens within their society; and when students developed a better understanding of the world in which they lived, then they could potentially avoid the effects of poverty. Sosnowski (2015), the author of the article entitled, *Statistics on How Poverty Affects Children in Schools*, stated that one in five

children who resided in the United States of America lived in poverty. The ills of poverty affect more than just students' housing status and food supply. Children who come from low-income families, face increase risk factors in their educational life as well. She stated, "Poverty affects students' brain development, relationships with peers and their ability to complete a formal education" (Sosnowski, 2015, p. 33).

In an effort to better understand students, teachers were taught that poverty impacts three major areas of students' lives and negatively affects their abilities to be social. The three areas were emotional well-being, brain development and school achievement. Poverty also affects children's psychological state, emotional state, interests in school and overall happiness. Students of poverty were typically at higher risks for suffering with depression, and depression is oftentimes reflected in students' poor behaviors in school and problems with the development of healthy relationships with their classmates.

Students' home lives strongly influence their growth, experiences, exposures, and vocabulary/language skills. Students who reported to school from higher income homes tended to increase their vocabulary development at twice the rate of students who came from homes, where the students lived in poverty. Delays in brain development and learning disabilities were more commonly found in students who lived in poverty.

Ethical and Moral Analysis

The implications from an ethical and socially moral perspective was teachers had a professional obligation to make cultural connections by building bridges between home and school. Gaitan (2006), the author of the book entitled, "*Building Culturally Responsive Classrooms: A Guide for K-6 Teachers*", stated that there are two major institutions that have the most influence on students' learning: the family and what occurs

in the classrooms. She stated that educators cannot control what happened within students' families, but they could control what occurred within their classrooms and schools. According to Gaitan (2006), cultural manifestations in classrooms were products of the teachers' cultural background, the students' cultural backgrounds, the schools' policies, the formal curriculums, the teacher-student interactions and the language the teachers used during their delivery of instruction (Gaitan, 2006, p. 3). Gaitan (2006) stated that these cultural manifestations were typically governed solely by the teachers' values, symbols and beliefs, with minimal input from the students, yet students were the ones that were the most affected by the cultural manifestations.

The quality of student learning in the classrooms was primarily prompted by the relationships and active interactions between the teachers and their students. These relationships usually centered on the decisions made by the teachers regarding the types of instruction, the choice of curriculum, the delivery of knowledge and the way the students were challenged to think critically. Gaitan stated, "Implicit and explicit values were imparted in the process" (Gaitan, 2006, p. 3). The context of verbal and nonverbal engagement that occur during the learning process is constructed by the teachers as evidenced by their lesson planning practices.

Gaitan (2006) indirectly suggested that teachers' lesson planning and preparation practices were critical components of teaching and learning, because teachers' practices determined the efficiency in their abilities to maintain a safe culture for learning and the delivery of effective instruction. Through the planning process teachers intentionally manage their settings to accommodate and maximize students' ability to learn while incorporating students' experiences in the day-to-day instruction. Teachers create

culturally responsive classrooms and continuity in supporting student learning by incorporating students' home language and other culture nuances into their daily instructional practices. She stated, "When this occurs, students are better able to participate more meaningfully in the learning process and succeed academically" (Gaitan, 2006, p. 4).

SECTION THREE: ADVOCATED POLICY STATEMENT

The primary goal for this advocated policy was to offer a recommendation for this school to revise their previous lesson plan policy in an effort to provide teachers with a viable tool to make cultural connections with students to improve learning. After an initial one year implementation at the school level to address any potential mishaps with its implementation, there were plans to later recommend this policy to the district for a possible adoption of practice. It was believed that an increased awareness of the importance of culturally responsive lesson plans would help teachers to recognize the benefits that this revised policy could have on establishing positive cultures for learning, and improving the school's climate and critical accountability data.

Policy Objectives

There were several objectives that were included in the action plan to assist teachers with the creation of culturally responsive lesson plans, positively connecting with their students to improve teaching and learning and become culturally proficient. Teachers had to be taught how to get to know their students both inside and outside of school. Teachers were required to make initial contact with all of their students and parents during the first month of school. A Fall Open House was hosted prior to the first day of school. Staff, students and parents were encouraged to meet, greet and share a

meal together. If parents were unable to attend the open house, teachers were required to call parents, introduce themselves and listen as parents shared details about their children. In November, January, March and May, all teachers were required to place positive telephone calls home for all students and once again listen to parents to gather additional information about their students.

At the beginning of the school year, teachers conducted several assessments/surveys of not only their students' academic benchmark data, but also to assess their learning styles and interests. The early childhood teachers sent surveys home to parents to gather student data, while the primary and intermediate teachers had the students complete a character assessments and learning style inventory in class. Most teachers hung and displayed their students' "All about Me!" posters in the hallways outside their classrooms to promote student pride and connect them to their classrooms.

Teachers were given opportunities to strengthen their own cultural proficiency and develop an awareness of the personal immunities that hindered them from effectively performing their professional responsibilities at staff professional development sessions. They participated in culturally games and other activities that helped to identify their hidden/competing commitments, big assumptions and what they were/were not doing. Through these games and activities, teachers were able to acknowledge their misinterpretations and readjust their personal biases in order to connect positively to their students. Teachers also exposed their students to some of these activities. For example, they played cultural games such as "*Say That, This is My Family* and *What's in a Name?*" as ways to get to know students and gather more information. Teachers utilized the data that they gathered to plan for instruction.

Lastly, during professional development sessions teachers were also consistently provided with fresh and innovative ideas/CRT strategies that they could be integrated into their plans and classrooms. These ideas and strategies were introduced by fellow colleagues who experienced success in this area. Through collaborations, idea exchanges and visible success other teachers were motivated to research and locate resources to improve their cultural proficient, and inadvertently, the quality of their teaching.

Policy's Representation of Students' Needs, Values and Preferences

The revision of this policy represented the students' needs, values and preferences. Far too often student needs and best interests were underrepresented in teachers' lesson planning and instructional practices. Despite the fact that "students first" was the mantra most teachers upheld and communicated, teachers' initial lesson planning practices stated differently. The revision of this policy placed student needs and interests at the forefront of the planning process. It encouraged teachers to delve deeply into the lives/minds of students and personalize instruction.

Walker Tileston and Darling (2008) stated that when teachers take their students' cultures into consideration during their lesson planning process, a number of dynamic things occurred. They build resilience in children of poverty and create relevancy for students of diverse cultures. They increase students' sense of efficacy and confidence as a person and as a learner. They build the background knowledge that is necessary to level the playing field for learning by activating prior knowledge and experience to address new learning tasks to facilitate storage and ability to retrieve information. These teachers recognize and respect the relationships and social knowledge that are critical to the continued success of students. They create opportunities for the brain-compatible conditions and hold high expectations which allow success for all students as they

engaged in the learning process. Finally, they stated that teachers could differentiate the context, content, product process with relative ease. When teachers acknowledge that culture counts, they ensure the successful engagement of diverse learners and students living in poverty; and ultimately create opportunities to connect the disconnected to their own learning (Darling, 2008, p. 96).

Validation of Goals and Objectives

The goals and objectives of this revised policy was validated as appropriate and good when there was visible improvement in the overall school climate, teacher/student relationships, increased academic growth, reduction in incident referrals, and the chronic disrupters were reduced to only fifteen students. There were visible signs that students benefited from their teachers' thoughtfulness as they planned for instruction and created culturally responsive classroom environments. As Walker Tileston and Darling (2008) stated, teachers' lesson plans were well-crafted, included a framework for quality instruction, and reflected a standards-based education. Teachers set high academic and behavior expectations and refused to settle for less than students' best efforts. Teachers actively worked on problem solving techniques and kept most students in their classrooms learning.

Teachers transformed their instructional practices to be more reflective of their students' needs. They incorporated on-going assessments which were used to determine how well students understood the concepts and skills that were taught, and exercised flexibility if they needed to make mid-course changes in their instructional directions. They were more in tuned to their students. They provided students with additional support to ensure their continued interest and engagement in learning and success. Some teachers even tutored students during lunch and after school. Teachers actively infused

culturally responsive teaching practices to promote school connectedness for students. This change in practice allowed them to make effective use of their instructional time and maximized students' time on task. Most importantly, this policy was appropriate and good because it required teachers to spend time in deep reflection and intentionally/strategically plan for instruction in an effort to make the necessary cultural connections and build relationships with students to more effectively reach, teach and motivate them to take ownership of their learning journeys.

SECTION FOUR: POLICY ARGUMENT

Although the district had an established lesson plan policy, Administrative Policy 8.1 that the school had to abide by, it was treated with a low level of importance and viewed as insignificant by teachers through the district. The format and usages of the current lesson plan policy varied from teacher-to-teacher and from school-to-school. There were no specific guidelines and/or rubric alignments; however, there were a few required elements, but they were very general, vague and allowed teachers' an abundance of latitude. Teachers were granted total autonomy and allowed to use their own discretion. In other words, teachers were permitted to utilize their perceived knowledge, understandings, assumptions, interpretations and biases of their students to create lesson plans as they chose. Administrative Policy 8.1 lacked several key elements that were critical to effectiveness teaching and learning namely CRT strategies.

According to this policy, teachers were expected to maintain written lesson plans that were to be kept readily available on their desks during instruction plans should be completed and updated weekly, and during the week as needed. It stated that teachers' lesson plans should include their intended learning intentions, educational activities and

specific references to instructional materials. This policy required teachers to post their learning intentions and success criteria in their classrooms in areas that were highly visible to students and other classroom visitors. Administrative Policy 8.1 stated that administrators had the authority to make requests to see teachers' lesson plans periodically, but not weekly unless the administrators had concerns regarding the quality and/or effectiveness of their lesson plans. Then administrators could require teachers to submit their lesson plans on a more regular basis, but still not weekly!

Administrative Policy 8.1 lacked several critical components. This policy, as it was written, did not require teachers to include reflections of their instructional practices and utilize their reflections to determine what went well during instruction and what did not. There were no stated requirements to include content that needed to be retaught, inclusions of instructional groupings and/or intended differentiation of activities based on students' performance levels and needs, nor did it include a section for students' interests and/or cultural connection. It did not offer and/or mandate the use of a universal template to unify the expectations and/or practices for teachers throughout the school.

The Pros and Cons of Lesson Plans

A blogger on the "*Teach and Learn with Georgia*" website stated in a post, "Not all planned lessons are fabulous and not all unplanned lessons are a disaster, but even a bad lesson plan will be less bad planned, and even a great lesson can be greater with a plan (Panoptical, 2012)." This same blogger went on to state that if teachers are good at teaching unplanned lessons, then they would be even better teaching with a plan (Panoptical, 2012). This blogger's statements provided a clear summation of the research that addressed the pros and cons of the importance of teachers' lesson planning practices

and the creation of lesson plans. There was an abundance of research that clearly supported the pros, rationales and benefits of the importance of teachers' lesson planning practices accompanied by implementations of detailed, effective and efficient lesson plans as a best practice to adequately meet students' needs. There was a lot of research that provided clear explanations and implications of teachers' failure to develop and utilize a lesson planning process; and the negative impact that this practice could potentially have on students' attendance, behavior and academic achievement. However, the research to support the cons of lesson planning was zilch! There was absolutely no research that could be found that supported the notion that teachers' lesson planning practices and the uses of lesson plans were not important to teaching and learning.

According to the research related to the best practices of teachers' lesson planning and its necessities, the implementation of effective and efficient lesson plans to navigate through curriculum, select the best teaching strategies and meet students' individual needs was critical to the learning process for both the teachers and the students. First, according to Panoptical (2012), a blogger on the "*Teach and Learn with Georgia*" website, teachers' lesson planning practices and the development of lesson plans were important because they helped teachers to maintain a focus. This blogger reported that lesson plans were a necessity because teachers were often faced with a classroom full of students with short attention spans and a natural desire to disrupt anything and everything, and the uses of lesson helped to keep instruction on track. A lack of lesson plans would have made it very easy for teachers' intended lessons to be sidetracked or derailed completely off track. She stated that the best way for teachers to steer their lessons back on track and or to keep lessons on track, was to have clear and detailed

lesson plans handy at all time. To create lessons as you go could lead to detrimental results.

Panoptical (2012) stated in a blog that students knew when their teachers did not really know what to do. She stated that when teachers began to show signs of weakness in the deliveries of their instruction, then those students viewed these areas of weaknesses as opportunities to wreak havoc within the learning environments. Panoptical stated, “A primary school lesson is a battle of wills, and if you (teachers) blink you lose” (Panoptical, 2012). She stated that lesson plans were teachers’ best weapons to use to compete in and conquer classroom battles. She said that students typically responded extraordinarily well with structure and regularity. She stated that teachers who took the time to plan out lessons provided their students with that much needed structure and regularity.

Panoptical (2012) stated that a lack of lesson plans had the potential to lead to disruptive learning environments and dismal school climates. She stated that students usually responded to “dead air” in lessons and moments of uncertainty by creating chaos. She stated that if students observed their teachers floundering in their thinking about what to do, then students would spend that time in search of finding creative ways to mentally escape from the educational activities by playing. Panoptical stated that when teachers loss focus of the routes that led them to their instructional goals; and the students sieged those opportunities to take the wheel and set out to navigate through their own learning journeys with an absence of the roadmap, then that situation had the potential to become almost impossible for those teachers to recover the direction and focus of their class.

Panoptical (2012) stated that lesson plans kept both the teachers and the students on track and helped to improve the context of their lessons. She stated that teachers' lesson planning practices assisted teachers with tracking the progress and problems of instruction. When teachers' lesson planned, they actually created paperwork trails of everything they taught; and they could refer back to those plans at later dates. When teachers created a paper trails of their lesson plans, then their lesson plans served as resource tools when they discovered that their students were not learning. Teachers were able to reflect on which lessons needed to be amended and possibly re-taught in a different manner. Panoptical stated that the paper trail of previous lessons helped teachers to learn from their mistakes and missteps. If students learned something really well, then teachers reflected on that lesson and learned what worked. Panoptical stated, "You (teachers) can start to learn to be a better teachers overall and for each particular class, and you don't have to do it via memory" (Panoptical, 2012).

Panoptical (2012) stated that if teachers developed really good lesson plans, then they had opportunities to share them with other, so they also benefited. She stated that teachers' lesson plans served as concrete evidence that supported their regular efforts and contributions toward the continuous improvement of their accountable data. Teachers' lesson plans also served as a teaching tool that supported other teachers who may be struggled with their instructional practices. She stated that some teachers even found it beneficial to use their written lesson plans as resource tools to show parents what they did during their instructional times and demonstrated their efforts to support their children's learning. Panoptical stated, "People will think you (teachers) are magically organized" (Panoptical, 2012).

Panoptical (2012) stated that teachers' lesson plans were important because they provided teachers with a sense of accomplishment and tangible evidence to reflect their accomplishments. Panoptical stated, "A lesson plan from a lesson that went really well was like a personal award certificate" (Panoptical, 2012). Panoptical stated that since lesson plans served as tools to help teachers keep track of what worked and what did not work, then teachers' lesson planning practices, developments and implementations tended to get better and better. Panoptical (2012) stated that if teachers continued to fine tune their lesson planning practices, then their efforts and hard work had the potential to renew a sense of success and accomplishment. Panoptical stated, "These types of accomplishments increased your motivation, your productivity, your work engagement and satisfaction" (Panoptical, 2012).

Another blogger posted comments on the "*Linguistics*" website provided additional opinions which also supported why teachers' lesson planning practices and the development of lesson plans were important to improving attendance, behaviors and academic achievement. This blogger stated in an online post, "Lessons that are well planned are more likely to help students and teachers avoid, frustrations and unpleasant surprises, stay on track and achieve their objectives" (Blogger, 2015). She stated that teachers' lesson planning practices allowed teachers to visualize and better prepare for every step of the teaching process in advance. These visualizations, inadvertently, had the potential to help to increase the teachers' success.

According to this same Linguistics Blogger (2015), well-crafted lesson plans with detailed descriptors served as guides for students, substitute teachers and teachers. This blogger stated that well-crafted lesson plans helped save the class and prevented wasted

days of instruction. If for some reason, teachers were not able to teach their own classes, and then well-crafted detailed lesson plans that were left behind had the potential to provide substitute teachers with invaluable guidance and help students to not miss days of valuable instruction. This blogger also suggested that well-crafted detailed lesson plans helped teachers by providing them with a record that allows them to reflect on their instructional practices, go back to analyze their own teaching, and improve on it in the future. This blogger suggested that when teachers reflect, then they increased their potentials to strengthen their instructional and lesson planning practices by simply answering two questions: what went well and what did not?

This Linguistics blogger (2015) suggested in their online post that the records that teachers created as a result of their lesson planning practices saved them time in the future. According to this blogger, when teachers taught similar lessons, they referred back to their previous lesson plans, which were kept in files and recycled the successful elements contained in their old plans. This practice saved teachers' time, because it prevented them from starting from scratch. This blogger stated, "Although it (lesson planning) requires an investment of time and energy, lesson planning produces many valuable benefits" (Blogger, 2015).

In conclusion, with the abundance of reported struggles for many teachers to motivate large numbers of students whose experiences are typically different than their own, it was sometimes incredibly hard for teachers to truly know how they were doing; however, the creation of lesson plans followed by reflections of how lessons went surprisingly served as powerful motivators for teachers. Panoptical (2012) suggested that teachers could potentially improve their instructional practices by creating effective and

efficient lesson plans that motivates their students to want to learn. Panoptical (2012) stated that the implementation of lesson plan set discrete and achievable goals that teachers aimed for during their presentations, then judged the success of their plans during the production phase of their lesson. This practiced served as the best method for teachers to evaluate their own instructional practices.

Panoptical (2012) stated that based on her experiences, the planning of lessons, having them go well and feeling like something was learned served as the biggest source of happiness and motivation for teachers. Panoptical (2012) stated that when lessons were not planned, then motivation levels drained away quickly. Panoptical stated, “If you need that daily boost, and I think we all do, planning and assessing your lessons is the way to go” (Panoptical, 2012). Panoptical stated that if teachers incorporated regular lesson planning practices into their weekly instructional practices, then at the end of each school year, instead of asking if they made a difference, they could point to their paper trail of evidence and show exactly the difference that they made. Panoptical closed her blog by stating, “Plan your lessons. It will do wonders for your students, and it will do wonders for you (teachers)” (Panoptical, 2012).

SECTION FIVE: POLICY IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

Milkova (2015), the author of an online article entitled, “*Strategies for Effective Lesson Planning,*” stated, “A lesson plan is the instructor’s road map of what students need to learn and how it will be done effectively during the class time” (Milkova, 2015). It was emphasized that effective and efficient lesson plans were the intended routes that teachers planned to take to help guide the direction of their instruction and lead their students toward their targeted destinations, academic goals. In an effort to demonstrate

the importance of and administrative feasibility of this advocated revised lesson plan policy and the need to help teachers to make the necessary cultural connections to ensure students success and school's accountable data, during the 2015-2016 school year, the learning team developed and implemented a staff development plan that included a list of the professional development sessions, educational activities, time schedule, program budget and progress monitoring activities. They utilized the suggestions from and recommendations of experts in this field as our guide to help us to research the best practices and revise our previous lesson plan policy. The professional development sessions included power points, agendas with learning intentions, success criteria and listings of our intended educational activities.

The professional development plan began with a prerequisite activity related to an identification of the purposes of education, schools, teaching, learning and teachers' work. According to Volo, who posted comments on the "*Inspiring your Very Best*" website, people in general needed to know the purpose for their work, before they could, would and fully embraced their work and inspire others. Volo stated, "It is essential to know why you do what you do, this is your purpose" (Volo, 2015). When individuals knew their purpose; and their purpose was clear and communicated to everyone in ways that were easily understood everyone could get on the same boat and move forward in the right direction. Volo (2015) stated that an awareness of their purpose was the first foundational block for success implementations. When the purpose was made clear, then one could build their well-organized systems on it. Volo stated, "When a company is not in touch with its purpose, it will be lost (Volo, 2015)."

In an effort to help staff build their knowledge of best-practices lessoning planning practices on solid foundations and gain clearer understandings of the purpose for their work, the research of Jones, Carter and Salter was shared. During this educational activity the teachers were requested to write their own purpose statement. They were asked to take deep dives into a discovery of their purpose by conducting a root analysis. They were asked to respond repeatedly to the following two questions:

1. Why do you do what you do?
2. Why is that?

After staff responded to these two questions, they were asked a third question. The third question was as follows:

3. Is it a purpose that will inspire others to take actions?

Volo (2015) stated that if the participants' response to the third question did not inspire others to take actions, then the identified purpose was not the biggest purpose. She suggested that participants continue to answer these three questions until they discovered their highest purpose. Volo stated, "Knowing the purpose then becomes the guiding light for smooth sailing (Volo, 2015)." After teachers identified their purpose, they were encouraged to post their purpose statement in a highly visible area near their desks. When staff sat down each week to create their lesson plans for the following week, they would reflect on their purpose statements and have a clear understand as to why they do what they do.

According to Jones (2012), author of the article entitled, "*What is the Purpose of Education,*" the purpose of education was to prepare students for specific careers, by

teaching them lifelong values, discipline and the ability to explore new ideas and to think independently. Jones stated that the goals of education are as follows:

- ✓ Prepare children for citizenship
- ✓ Cultivate a skilled workforce
- ✓ Teach cultural literacy
- ✓ Help students become critical thinkers
- ✓ Help students compete in a global market

Jones stated the purpose and goals for education are reflective of the diversity of expectations and prioritization that society and its teachers have to manage. She said that education serves multiple objectives; and the importance of these objectives are very personal. The various levels of emphasis on the educational objectives were a result of the diverse economic, social, spiritual, cultural and political realities of individual lives. She stated, “Likewise, how we deliver instruction and how we measure success in schools as a predictive indicator of our future success in society and, indeed, one could argue the metrics for society’s success as a whole, must be updated to match” (Jones, 2012, p. 1).

According to Carter (2012), author of the article entitled, “*What’s the Purpose of Schools in the 21st Century*”, the purpose of schools was to prepare students to compete in a global environment. School was a place where children could go to gain skills to enter the workforce. Carter reported that schools were places where teachers taught the whole-child. Carter stated that that meant each child in the classrooms should have been healthy, safe, engaged, supported and challenged. He stated, “The general purpose of school is to

transfer knowledge and prepare young people to participate in America's democratic society" (Carter, 2012, p. 3).

Jones and Carter indirectly suggested in their explanations of the purpose of education and schools that teachers were directly responsible for preparing students for either college and or career readiness post high school. Their research suggested that the best ways for teachers to accomplish the goals of education was by the creation of lesson plans that were aimed to prepared students for the twenty-first century world of work and place them in viable economic positions to compete in the global environment. Failures to produce effective and efficient lesson plans as a preventative measure reduced students' chances of experiencing disconnectedness in schools and increased their chances of continuing the vicious cycle of being economically disadvantaged.

According to Salter (2011), the author of a religious bulletin entitled, *Links to Learning: Summer Holiday Edition,* " the purpose of teaching and learning was to help students develop and extend concepts that they learned to better understand the world they live in. Salter stated that the purpose of teaching and learning was to help children solve problems and communicate what they know. She stated that teaching and learning was meant to help children make meaningful connections between bodies of knowledge and their already existing concepts. She stated that these connections should have led to deeper understandings of the world in which they live and improve their ability to the solve problems this dynamically changing world presents to us (Salter, 2011, p. 1).

After the completion of the prerequisite activity, our Professional development plan included introductions of several educational activities that were related to the critical components that needed to be included in effective and efficient unit and lesson

plans. In an effort to guide this portion of our work, the learning team utilized the latest research and lesson plan recommendations of the school district, The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction and several well-known researchers. They collectively created a school-wide universal template for both teachers' monthly unit and weekly lesson plans. The revised universal template was compatible for use in all subjects. This process was completed by conducting reviews of our teachers' current lesson plans, the district's recommended lesson plan templates and Wisconsin Department of Education recommended lesson plan templates. They abstracted the best features from all and used them to create a universal template that was implemented school-wide. After the development the revised universal lesson plan template with our desired components, they hosted several professional development sessions and slowly introduced the universal lesson plan template in parts their teachers.

After teachers received adequate training related to the critical components that should have been included in efficient and effective lesson plans; and teachers were able to produce written lesson plans upon request that consistently included all six of the critical components of lesson plans, the next section of our professional develop plan was the introduction of culturally responsive teaching strategies. The introductions of culturally responsive teaching strategies assisted teachers to build culturally responsive classrooms to better meet their students' unique needs. The learning team utilized the research and work of Thompson and Gaitan to prepare the presentations for this series.

In an article entitled, "*How to Create a Culturally Responsive Classroom,*" Thompson (2015) provided a series of steps which if implemented in school systems could assist teachers to build culturally responsive classrooms. Thompson stated that

every person, regardless of their cultural backgrounds, deserved opportunities to belong. She said that to ignore students' cultural differences was to deliberately choose to create strife and tension within the learning environments. She stated, "Conversely, acceptance and celebration of differences provides rich resources for your (teachers) class" (Thompson, 2015).

Thompson suggested that teachers show acceptance and celebrate their students' differences by raising their cultural awareness and taking four simple actions within their schools. The teachers were shown how to implement Thompson's four action steps for the creation of culturally responsive classrooms. The four steps were as follows:

1. Assess your own attitude, then set the tone
2. Engage students in conversations about culture
3. Pay attention to families and communities
4. Provide culturally responsive instruction

According to Thompson, if schools were clear about their behavior expectations, the culture of the learning environments would successfully guide students' behaviors (Thompson, 2015).

According to Thompson (2015), the first action that teachers were encouraged to take to create culturally responsive classrooms within their schools was to conduct assessments of their own attitude, then set the tone for their students. Thompson (2015) stated that teachers should have an understanding of how the cultures they come from helped to shape their own attitudes. She suggested that if students' cultures were different from the teachers', then teachers should strive to be sensitive to how their perspectives might differ from their students. Teachers look for ways to expose their students to a

variety of different cultures. This helps students to become more accepting of and tolerant of their own differences. She suggested that whenever possible, teachers should incorporate a variety of multi-cultural materials into their lesson planning and instructional practices. Thompson encouraged teachers to learn more about the various cultures that their students represented in their classrooms. She said that teachers should spend time talking to other teachers about sharing and the location of different resources. Thompson stated, “Once you (teachers) are aware of the subtle differences among your students, you’ll find it easier to be a more effective teacher” (Thompson, 2015).

Thompson (2015) suggested that teachers engage students in conversations about cultures. She suggested that teachers conduct discussions about various cultures. This action is a very important part of the educational activities, and should be hosted without fear of losing valuable instructional time. Teachers should incorporate an abundance of structured activities in their lesson plans that allow students to interact in productive ways and learn from their classmates’ cultures. She stated that these cultural opportunities promote successful collaborations, exposures to a variety of worldwide cultures, and broadens the understanding of the classroom materials of each other and the world in which they live.

Thompson (2015) stated that teachers should pay attention to the parents and the community. Thompson encouraged teachers to be accepting of students’ parents’ concerns regarding their cultural differences. This action helps teachers to refrain from imposing their beliefs on the parents/guardians and allows them to discover the parent/guardian’s goals for their children. Teachers can then explore all of the available resources that have the potential to help them successfully reach and teach all students.

Marion-Howard Policy Advocacy

During the 2015-2016 school year, the following time schedule and educational topics were introduced during the monthly professional development sessions:

<u>Month</u>	<u>Topic</u>	<u>Educational Activity</u>
August	What is Your Purpose?	Develop a purpose statements
September with the	Critical Elements of Lesson Plans	Develop monthly unit/ lesson plans
	Wagner’s Seven Survival Skills	Critical Elements of Lesson Plans
October plans	Top Ten Lesson Planning Tips	Develop monthly unit/ weekly lesson
	Introductions of Action Steps to Create Culturally Responsive Classrooms	with the Top Ten Lesson Planning Tips
November plans with opportunity	Engaging with Children’s Values around	Develop monthly unit/ weekly lesson
	Cooperative Learning and Cooperation	cooperative learning and cooperation
	Culturally Responsive Discipline Importance of School-Connectedness	
December with strategies	Accelerating Exceptional Students from All	Develop monthly/ weekly lesson plans
	Linguistic and Cultural Groups	Infusions of culturally responsive
	Connecting Home and School	
January plans to	Including Students with Special Needs in the	Develop monthly Unit/ weekly lesson
	Culturally Responsive Classrooms	with emphasis on the inclusion of ways Include students with special needs
February with strategies	Culturally Responsive Classroom Management	Develop monthly/ weekly lesson plans Infusions of culturally responsive
	Supporting Children’s Cultural Adjustment	Develop monthly/ weekly lesson plans Infusions of culturally responsive
March with strategies	Supporting Children’s Cultural Adjustment	Develop monthly/ weekly lesson plans Infusions of culturally responsive
	Connecting Home and School	Develop monthly/ weekly lesson plans Infusions of culturally responsive
April with strategies	Connecting Home and School	Develop monthly/ weekly lesson plans Infusions of culturally responsive
	Connecting Home and School	Develop monthly/ weekly lesson plans Infusions of culturally responsive
May with strategies	Connecting Home and School	Develop monthly/ weekly lesson plans Infusions of culturally responsive
	Connecting Home and School	Develop monthly/ weekly lesson plans Infusions of culturally responsive

All staff development sessions were scheduled to be held from 2:30–3:30 p.m. on the second and fourth Tuesday of each month in the school’s library; however, teachers were granted some leniency when unforeseen circumstances arose. In these cases, teachers were granted a 15-minute grace period and expected to report to these sessions no later than 2:45 p.m.

The proposed allocated budget to implement the content and required materials of this professional development plan that supported my advocated lesson plan policy was minimal. To my knowledge there were unforeseen costs affiliated with the implementation of this staff development plan. There was no costs needed to compensate the members of the learning team, staff labor and or participation in the scheduled professional development sessions, because this work was associated with their regularly scheduled contracted professional responsibilities as employees assigned to my school and employed by our district. There were no additional costs affiliated with the purchase of materials and or supplies to develop and or create the various presentations/ materials for the educational activities, which are outlined as a part of this professional development plan, because once again it was not outside of the realm of our professional obligations. There was a preconceived cost associated with the purchase of flash drives for all classroom teachers to store and share their lesson plans, but as the building principal, I had an authority to utilize funds from our school’s budget to purchase the flash drives for teachers. The purchased flash drives were considered to be a normal acceptable purchase in accordance with our district financial guidelines.

In an effort to promote accountability and ensure the success of this advocated lesson plan policy implementation, there were several progress monitoring activities

implemented. All teachers, regardless of their specialty, were required to create and implement monthly unit and weekly lesson plans into their instructional practices. Classroom teachers were required to submit copies of their plans on a designated flash drive either bi-weekly, monthly at random. At the beginning of the school year, plans were collected and reviewed bi-weekly to ensure proficiency. As the school year progressed and teachers required to submit their plans that include all of the required critical components with infusions of culturally responsive teaching strategies, as evidence collection of plans less gradually. The frequency was reduced to monthly unit and lesson plans checks at random.

In an effort to promote accountability and ensure the success of this advocated lesson plan policy implementation, this policy implementation plan was also require me (the administrator) to collect, review and provide detailed constructive feedback to teachers related to their submitted lesson plans. During my lesson plans reviews, I looked for evidence that teachers were using assessment data and knowledge of students to design and implement personalized instruction for individual students and or instructional groups. I looked for evidence that teachers incorporated both culturally responsive teaching and other improvement strategies to enhance students learning experiences and connect them to school. I was sure to provide teachers with written feedback that was used to improve their lesson planning practices and inadvertently their instructional practices. I met with teachers, as often as needed, to model and assist them with effective lesson planning practices. I maintained the privacy and confidentiality of the teachers' who needed personalized assistance and or intervention discussions.

I conducted informal and formal classroom observations with emphasis on the effects that teachers' lesson planning practices had on both their classroom environment and assessments for learning. I utilized the work of Fullan et al. (2006) in his book entitled, "*Breakthrough*," as my guide for the classroom observations. I looked for evidence that teachers had sets of powerfully and aligned assessment tools that were supported with their learning intentions for each lesson. I looked for evidence that teachers consistently utilized assessment methods that were not time consuming during instruction to collect formative assessment data of student learning, then used the collected information to drive their future instructional decision. I also looked for evidence of teachers using built-in means of monitoring and managing student behaviors. I looked for evidence of teachers testing what worked during classroom instruction and helped teachers to respond more precisely to the learning needs of each student in their class.

SECTION SIX: POLICY ASSESSMENT PLAN

Fullan et al.(2006) in his book entitled, "*Breakthrough*," stated, "The only way classroom instruction can become all the things we want it to be is through attention to design and the creation of expert instructional systems" (Michael Fullan, 2006, p. 39). In an effort to ensure that the classroom instruction that occurred in my school was all that I wanted it to be, I promoted the creation of one of my school's expert instructional systems by creating and implementing a policy assessment plan that I thought ensured that teachers created effective and efficient lesson plans that successfully could meet students' needs and improves our school's accountable measures. I utilized the work of Fullan et al. as a guide to create this policy assessment plan.

According to Fullan et al, (2006) the heart of every expert system had two subsystems: knowledge base and case-specific data. Fullan et al. described the knowledge based subsystem as the actions that experts took in particular situations; and the case-specific data subsystem as the use of the data that was related to the situation at hand. Fullan et al. (2006) stated that in an expert instructional system, the case-specific data consisted of information on the previous and current status of learners. I used the case-specific data to monitor progress and evaluate the outcomes and results of my advocated policy implementation. I then described in my assessment plan how individuals and or groups were responsible for the policy's implementation, how administration were held accountable and what reports and procedures were to be followed.

In an effort to ensure that teachers gain the knowledge that was presented during the scheduled professional development sessions and demonstrated proficient skills to develop effective and efficient monthly unit and weekly lesson plans as outlined in the advocated lesson plan policy, I utilized several progress monitoring activities. This series of formative assessments was used to check for both teachers' understanding and compliance. At the end of each professional development session, I utilized either a verbal questioning technique and or written exit slips to gauge the teachers' comprehension and understanding of the information that was presented at the professional development sessions, or at the beginning of each professional development session, teachers were sometimes asked to provide a verbal or written summary of the lessons learned from the previous professional development session.

In an effort to gauge teachers' cooperation, acceptance, lesson planning practices, compliance and the effectiveness of the staff development sessions, I conducted either

weekly, bi-weekly or monthly evidence collections of teachers' lesson plans. I utilized a chart to check-off teachers' lesson plan submissions. Either the school support teacher and or I reviewed the submitted unit/lesson plans to ensure that all of the critical components were consistently included in teachers' written plans. The school support teacher and or I provided teachers with written feedback related to their submitted plans. I attempted to conduct regular follow-ups and compliance checks within five days of teachers' receipt of constructive feedback.

In an effort to build leadership capacity among teachers, ensure success and promote a collective effort of the implementation of this advocated lesson plan policy, reviews of teachers' lesson plans were included as items for the learning team meeting agendas. Periodically, members of the learning team were requested to review teachers' submitted plans, identify both strengths and areas in need of improvement, share their opinions with the team, help determine future professional development needs, provide collective feedback to grade level teams and or assist with the offerings of additional professional development sessions. Learning team members were also be encouraged to visit teachers' classrooms, observe the quality of their colleagues' lesson planning practices and confidentially mentor their colleagues who were in need of assistance with their lesson planning practices.

In an effort to encourage camaraderie, collective collaborations and individualized support for teachers at their grade levels, grade level teams were required to host grade level meetings every other week. During these bi-weekly grade level meetings (pay weeks), grade level teams were required to begin each meetings with a review of their students' data. According to Fullan et al., "Experts are nothing without data on current

status, without it, all they can do is offer a highly qualified opinion” (Michael Fullan, 2006, p. 47), Teachers were requested to respond to five essential questions. The five essential questions were as follows:

1. What does the data say?
2. What do students need to learn?
3. How will I know that students are learning?
4. What will I do if students are not learning?
5. What will I do if students already know?

After teachers reflected on and responded to their five essential questions, they were required to collectively develop their lesson plans by making data driven decisions. The implementation of a Parallel Block Scheduling System, which required teachers at each grade level to share the responsibility of teaching all students, made it advantageous of teachers to plan for instruction collectively. Each grade level team were professionally responsible for the generation and submission of their weekly grade level minutes.

In an effort to expose grade level needs for assistance with their lesson planning practices, the school support teacher or I hosted grade level monitoring conferences at the end of each trimester. We met collectively for forty-five minutes with all members of each grade level team. This meeting included the classroom teachers, the school support teacher and the special education resource teachers. Either the school support teacher or I opened each monitoring conference with grade level teams with reviews of their students’ accountable grade level measures: attendance, behavior and academic. We were sure to verbally celebrate all positive gains in that was reflected in all of the data sources. The accountable grade level data measure reviews were followed by identifications of the

proposed instructional groupings of their students in accordance to their data results and their identified areas in need of improvement. The final portion of the monitoring conferences consisted of grade level teams responding to their past efforts to meet their students' areas that were deemed in need of improvement and their intended future lesson planning intentions that would be implemented to address those areas in need of improvement. I provided written summations of the discussions, concerns, recommendations, for teachers' who required future actions along with follow-up dates that stemmed from the monitoring conferences to promote accountability for all.

Our school staff, collectively, utilized our school's accountable data measure reports to gauge the success of this advocated lesson plan policy implementation. We collected, assessed, reviewed, analyzed, interpreted, arranged and reflected on our school's accountable data measure reports at once per monthly. Members of the learning team took turns presenting this information in a power point to staff during our monthly staff meetings. These presentations were followed by staff data chats, brief rationales for data, recommendations for plan of actions and continuous system-wide improvements. These recommendations then served as the "Look-fors" in teachers' written unit and lesson plans.

SECTION SEVEN: SUMMARY OF IMPACT STATEMENT

In summary, Jones (2012) informed us that the purpose of education was to prepare students for specific careers, by teaching them lifelong values, discipline, the ability to explore new ideas and to think independently. Jones stated in her research that the purpose and goals for education was to have teachers be reflective of and manage the diversity of expectations and prioritization that society sets for them. Jones informed us

that the goals of education was for teachers to prepare students for citizenship and to cultivate a skilled workforce. There were societal expectations for teachers to teach cultural literacy, help students become critical thinkers and help students compete in a global market.

Wagner (2010) informed us that there was a global achievement gap in our nation as a result of school failures to teach the new survival skills that students needed in order to compete in a global economy. Wagner (2010) stated that eighty-five percent of current jobs and almost ninety percent of the fastest-growing and best-paying jobs now required postsecondary education; however, many students were graduating from both high school and college unprepared for the twenty-first century world of work. Wagner states, “Even today’s manufacturing jobs now largely require postsecondary training and skills” (Wagner, 2010, p. 20). Wagner informed us that many employees who graduated with four year college degrees reported to their jobs with sufficient work-readiness skills. Wagner (2010) stated that these college graduates tended to have excellent basic knowledge and applied skills, as oppose to the high school graduate with minimal postsecondary training.

Blum (2005) informed us that students were more likely to succeed when they felt connected to their schools. School connectedness was an academic environment in which students believed that the adults within their schools cared about their learning, and about them as individuals. According to Blum (2005), if schools improved their students’ sense of belonging by increasing their school connectedness, then their critical accountability measures would more than likely be positively influenced. Blum recommended that schools and or districts implement the most effective researched-based strategies to

increase the likelihood that students felt a strong sense of connection to their schools. He believed if schools and or districts implement “best bet” research-based strategies and programs, then schools increased their potential to improve and sustain their critical accountable measures.

Thompson (2015) informed us that every person, regardless of their cultural backgrounds, deserved opportunities to experience a sense of belonging in their schools. She stated that to ignore students’ cultural differences was to deliberately choose to create strife and tension within the learning environments. She stated, “Conversely, acceptance and celebration of differences provides rich resources for your (teachers) class” (Thompson, 2015). Thompson suggested that teachers would began to show their acceptance and celebrate their students’ differences by raising their cultural awareness and taking the necessary actions to transform their classrooms and schools into culturally responsive learning environments. She stated, “If urban schools are to close the achievement gaps, maximally educate urban students and create healthy rapport among students, teachers and communities, then they (we) must address concepts of teacher preparation, cultural literacy and relations. These are the essential elements that are needed in teaching and learning methods that must be a top priority” (Lewis, 2011, p. 96).

I believed my advocated lesson plan policy was appropriate and among the best policies for my school, because it abstracted many of the key components affiliated the critical elements that should have been included in effective and efficient lesson plans. I believed if teachers were to improve their lesson planning practices to include culturally responsive teaching strategies, integrations of students’ cultural heritage/ interests and

experiences to promote strong senses of belongingness, then students would have embraced and took more authentic interests in the navigation of their own learning journeys. Teachers would have experienced reductions in their stress levels and job dissatisfaction, as a result of a gradual release of responsibility, decreased student disruptions, increased shared responsibility, increased work productivity, improved accountability measures and increased reasons to celebrate.

If this advocated lesson plan policy was successfully implemented, then teachers would regularly plan, prepare and implement lessons plans that efficiently prepared our students for high school graduation, career and college readiness. Teachers would regularly plan for instruction utilizing culturally responsive teaching strategies in an effort to ensure that their students were thoroughly prepared to compete in the global economy and successfully participate in the twenty-first century world of work. Teachers would, as Wagner suggested, teach the new survival skills that students needed today. Teachers would close the global achievement gap by placing emphasis on the seven survival skills: in their lesson planning practices.

This advocated lesson plan policy was appropriate and among the best policies for my school, because it demonstrated that our school was putting forth continuous efforts to move away from the “old world of school” and make positive strides toward a new context for schooling. We were the ones that were reinventing the ways teachers reflected on their lesson planning and instructional practices; and how those practices effected our students’ learning, behaviors, and school climate and accountability measures.

The students’ values were placed at the center of this advocated lesson plan policy, because our students were the individuals whose future economic and ability to survive in

our progressively changing world were at stake. They were the individuals who had to be prepared for opportunities to compete globally for specific careers in the world of work, and whose teachers were charged with the professional responsibilities to ensure that their goals evolved into fruition. The teachers at my school already earned their four year college degrees, had careers and financial stability to secure their future upon their retirements. Then a professional expectation for them to put forth concerted efforts to instill in our students lifelong values, discipline, the ability to explore new ideas, problem solve, to think independently, collaborate effectively utilizing a team approach to communicate with others in both written and verbal modes, so they could also be afforded the same opportunities.

The implementation of this advocated lesson plan policy was consistent with the vision behind it, because it assisted teachers to consciously reflect on, select, plan, prepare and implement lesson plans that included educational activities in their instructional practices that were realistic, relevant, rigorous and inclusive of culturally responsive teaching practices. It was my belief that the development of efficient and effective lesson plans helped to build culturally responsive classrooms where students felt a strong sense of belongingness, care, acceptance of and began to take a personal responsibility for the navigation of their own learning journeys.

In conclusion, the needs and concerns of all stakeholders were included sufficiently represented in this advocated lesson plan policy. I believed if implemented with fidelity, it provided a universal lesson plan template with a universal understanding of expectations a common language and fair accountability measures for all teachers regardless of their specialty. The professional development and assessment plans offered

teachers a simple and transparent guide that they could have used to create well-crafted lesson plans that increased opportunities for teachers to promote positive cultures for learning, effectively engage students in learning and increase students' awareness of their teachers' learning intentions. Most importantly, the research stated that well-crafted lesson plans helped teachers to establish daily routines, promote predictability for students and reduce the potential for stress by minimizing classroom disruptions. This advocated lesson plan policy encompassed all of the necessary critical components that were needed to create an effective and efficient transformation of teachers' lesson planning and instructional practices to promote a continuous system of improvement at my school.

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APPENDICES